



NO LOOKING BACK NOW MARK MCCAWLEY IN HIS OWN WORDS

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION
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INTRODUCTION

Mark McCawley, who died suddenly in April 2016, was an Edmonton-based writer, publisher, and critic. Mark published and edited [Urban Graffiti](#), a litzine that has an international reputation for publishing transgressive texts, including short stories, poetry, criticism, in-depth interviews with artists, and reviews of books, visual art, and music.

Writers, as Margaret Laurence said long ago, are a tribe; we know our own people, we have friends, and friends of friends, around the world—we have a lineage and a history—and as members of this tribe many of us came to be friends with Mark. He was, as Richard Rathwell said, of "the social poet class...", that social class is our tribe. He was one of us.

I first became acquainted with Mark McCawley in the early 1990s. He published, with his Greensleeve Editions, chapbooks for both my wife and I; it was Carolyn Zonailo's *The Letters of the Alphabet* (1992) and my *The Divining Rod* (1993). In 2008 I published Mark's collection of short stories, [Collateral Damage](#), on Coracle Press's online site. I also taught his short stories in my college-level English literature course; the response to his stories was always positive, the students appreciated his honesty and depiction of "real life". Mark wrote to me, "I think of all my literary experiences, I am most proud of the suite of stories you published, *Collateral Damage*. Even more so that you used those stories to teach your students." With time, there were other honours that Mark was also proud of, for instance being published in the [Evergreen Review](#).

It was in the early 1990s that Mark and I began to correspond, first by Canada Post, then E-mail, and for the last few years we also kept in touch on Facebook. Mark asked me to write a column for Urban Graffiti but personal events in my own life prevented me from doing this. Mark also published on Urban Graffiti several essays and fiction I wrote.

Like many writers Mark was an introvert; my image of Mark is him working in solitude, listening to the music he loved, going out for a coffee, editing and publishing Urban Graffiti, and doing his own writing. Mark also had serious health issues and this is what finally ended his life at age fifty-two; it is much too young to leave this world.

Mark was a highly intelligent and articulate advocate for literature and the arts. His passion was for transgressive literature but he was also interested in and affirmed the importance of literature in general. Mark and I agreed on many things about Canadian literature; for instance, that creative writing courses and the numerous awards for poetry that now exist have ended up promoting mediocre conservative writing. He was critical of everything fake, false, and hypocritical; Mark's integrity is part of why we valued him so much. One time I wrote to Mark that he was one of the most honest people on Facebook. I wrote, " ... Stay being honest, although I doubt you can do otherwise..."

If Mark had a message for writers it is to be true to one's vision, don't sell out, tell the truth of what you have witnessed. Whenever we think of softening our line, of selling out what we believe, we need only remember Mark McCawley and we will quickly return to our authentic vision, one that is at the core of our inner being.

The title of this essay, "No looking back now", are Mark's final words taken from his last communication with me. This morning I was thinking of Mark, I wondered: what will we do

without him? And then, after some reflection, I remembered what Mark said, that there is "no looking back now." I realized that this is what we must do, move on to the future, get on with life; that is what he would have said and what he would have wanted us to do.

Stephen Morrissey
Montreal, June 2016

MARK McCRAWLEY, FINAL FACEBOOK POSTS

February 20, 2016

There is something insidious about how easily this generation of CanLit feels not just the collective need to criticize a peer who happens to step out of social and sexual bounds into misogyny, but to destroy that peer altogether. Indeed, Irving Layton was a raging misogynist and homophobe, yet he was also an incredible Canadian poet. Have we become so intolerant of a writer's faults that we now must destroy them completely, or verbally stone them should someone utter their name publicly? Are we not big enough to forgive our brothers, and sisters, their temporary insanity?

February 21, 2016

Writing simultaneously about my own alcoholism, as well as my late father's (which also destroyed eleven of his brothers and sisters from a family of fourteen), the roots of which stretch back generations in my family — is akin to describing a slow-motion train-wreck in which everyone on board denies the train is even crashing. This is one theme I have long wrestled with (and been haunted by), both in life and in fiction, and I know my short fiction collection will never be truly complete until I wrestle it down satisfactorily in both.

February 21, 2016

I am tinged with a certain sadness as I watch characters from my unpublished short story collection, "Big Empty", materialize on the streets before my eyes. Characters who invested everything in the myth that the economic boom of Big Oil would realize all of their dreams. Now that Big Oil's boom has gone bust, dreams evaporate, families disintegrate, once proud men are homeless. And as per usual, these stories are ignored by a generation taught to pen more escapist literary fare. Even this generation of CanLit poetry is more fictive than lyrical. Who would pen Earle Birney's "David" for this generation?

February 22, 2016

Excellent interview. Robert Anderson wonderfully identifies the two-tiered literary culture in Canada: "Now poetry is all about political correctness. There's a growing literary McCarthyism scene in Canada. Everyday they demonized someone new on social media and call them a racist or misogynist or whatever they can think of. Usually the poets who do this are wimpy little characters in person but on social media they're filled with bravado." Kudos to Rob McLennan for posting this interview on his blog.

March 8, 2016

State of CanLit publishing: sent a collection of short fiction to a Canadian publisher and heard back three years later with best wishes in placing my novel elsewhere...

March 10, 2016

The best thing I ever did was drop out of university. The path of an autodidact has yet to fail me.

March 15, 2016

Masterpiece. I seldom, if ever, use that term. Or genius. They have been usurped by the marketplace to commodify too much wallpaper art and mediocre literature already. In the rare instances when I do use these terms, I want their meaning to carry some weight. We ought to celebrate those writers, artists, musicians who transcend their personal artistic boundaries, avoid easy commodification of their work, and by doing so motivate us to transcend our own by standing out, above, beyond. These are the first telltale signs of contemporary genius; how a potential masterpiece emerges from the murkiness of the marketplace.

March 18, 2016

The only truth is that we live on a ever-shrinking world full of nasty people who want you to believe what they believe, either through legislation, social coercion or by selling you something you really ought not to buy.

March 20, 2016

If certain subsidized Canadian publishers spent as much time and effort publishing and promoting new writers and poets with the same feral vigor with which they promote and attack particular Democratic Party candidates (an election in which they have no vote) instead of the increasingly insular old boys club of current and former creative writing instructors, just imagine how truly vibrant and transgressive CanLit could possibly be.

March 26, 2016

While mainstream artists and writers keep silent, pursuing the ongoing prestige grind of patting each other on the back for receiving questionable awards for work of dubious merit, underground and outsider artists and writers are in the trenches battling corrupt judges, corrupt politicians, and corrupt police who bend laws into clubs with which to destroy the artist's inalienable right to create and challenge the status quo.

March 27, 2016

For several decades now, I have witnessed brilliantly talented writers, poets, artists, and musicians systematically excluded and overlooked by an increasingly insular arts culture made up of a cabal of academic, corporate, and other conservative interests whose sole aim was to keep the culture exactly the way it has always been — serving the political, economic, and cultural elites. When was the last time an even remotely underground writer, artist, or musician got any mainstream press? Won a mainstream award with real cash value? This is why I am relentless in my promotion of underground writers and artists, and the small presses, magazines, and labels that publish, promote and release their work. They are the new Kerouacs, the new Burroughs, the new Warhols who boldly break new artistic, musical and literary boundaries with their work. They do not seek prestige; they seek visibility and acceptance.

March 27, 2016

Small magazines are the beating pulse of literature.

Last two Facebook Posts by Mark McCawley, 19 April 2016:

April 19, 2016

When all your heroes have turned to dust, you enter the realm of other frequencies, your spine is your antenna and your feet are your dials...

April 19, 2016

Just because my favorite poets have reached the ages of 60, 70, 80 doesn't make their poems any less wonderful. This youth intoxicated culture cannot seem to see passion, beauty, and desire unless it arrives with lines taut as twentysomething skin.

MARK MCCAWLEY, OUR FINAL FACEBOOK CONVERSATIONS



Yes. Dudek, Layton, could make young poets feel they were important. I recall in '85 when myself and another poet brought Layton to Edmonton for a series of readings, Layton shouted my name across a crowded bookstore (now long defunct) in that way of his... "Mark McCawley come read me your poems!" If anyone shaped how I was to behave as a writer, to other writers, and other people generally, it was Irving Layton. Even though my early poems had obvious flaws, he looked instead for their strengths. As a teacher and editor he believed his role was to build the young poet up, not tear them down. That, and always being honest and critical. Layton found many of the most ambitious poets were also the most mediocre. Caring more for social status and the prestige it brings (i.e. Cultural Hall of Fame in whatever city one resides). I've always felt it is more important to stick to one's principles. Publish new writers. It is a slippery slope into nepotism and literary corruption. Eventually we all answer for what we do, grants we take, deals we make. This is perhaps why I never accepted Canada Council, or provincial literary funding. I can remain truly independent and underground that way. It is sad what happened to Artie Gold. Makes one wonder how many of us will wind up sick and alone in the end. I understand the gloom you feel, Stephen. I share it sometimes.

01/13/2015 4:21PM



PC poets = Fictive poets. Quite true. I've been thinking a lot of how these poets have taken over in Canada. Dull, exceptional bores who imitate each other, incestuously publish one another, fear authenticity and originality like the flu. It's why I publish what and who I do. One has to shake the foundations. Myself, I have come to the point that I no longer wish to be published in Canada by a Canadian press. They are all entirely corrupt and completely politically correct.

APR 7TH, 2016, 11:22AM



I don't know if it is possible to change the current insular literary tide, the incest publishing, the academic prestige grind, the corrupting influence of arts funding at all levels, the absence of objective literary criticism. All I can do is continue doing what I have always done: promote

independent and underground writers and the small, independent presses that publish them. Yes, we are stuck in Canada, physically-speaking, but I have created a vehicle which leap frogs the whole corrupt CanLit structure. By going international, I endeavor to break through this insular tendency wherever I encounter it, and promote UG contributors as global, or as Richard Rathwell would refer to them, as trans-cultural writers. It is difficult to "make a noise" when the current literary landscape has been absconded by the culture of creative writing programs and their notion of the "literary expert" leaving autodidacts and seasoned, experienced writers and poets at the mercy of ageism, academic literary dogma, or simply outright indifference. I mean, how else can writers, poets, and small presses become persona non grata because they simply do not wish to become part of monolithic insular associations which promote and benefit only the few elite at the expense of the many? When I brought UG online in May, 2011, I knew there was no turning back for me. The hypocrisy, the mendacity, the mediocrity which has infected CanLit has become intolerable. That few if any writers, poets, or critics will call out CanLit for the commodified joke it has become, tells me I have been going in the right direction all along. Canada needs a fearless literary underground outside of academia but not excluding academics. This is what I try to do. Seeking out and promoting those truly unique voices without expectation of recompense for doing so. I'm sure if Dudek, Layton, Birney, Livesay, and others witnessed the nepotism which goes on at presses like BookThug they'd choke on their own bile...

APR 8TH, 2016, 12:12PM



I know exactly what you mean, Stephen. CanLit has gotten absolutely nasty. The same ppl coming out of academia are the same ppl running the festivals; an insular community growing more insular every day: a merry-go-round prestige grind (invite me to yours and I'll invite you to mine). Harbourfront being the most insidious and corrupt of them all. It could drive one insane if you let it. I just don't let it. Let them have their festivals and various prestige grinds, Stephen. You know what it important. The work. And the few close friends. I have gained more pleasure from publishing and promoting the unique writers, poets, and artists I have than trying to become popular. I leave that to oblivion. Finding joy in what you do each day is a humble goal, I think, and one I wish to share with you, my good friend.

APR 9TH, 2016, 11:16AM



It is so easy to get caught up in the politics of it all. I try to remove myself from it and concentrate on what is essential. The people. The history. All the stuff that gets overlooked. Too much time gets wasted just bitching about it. I decided to do something instead. I'm happy being isolated and uninterested in the b.s. of poetry but I wouldn't mind a teeny weeny bit of recognition for the fifty years I've put in on this... alas, it will not happen. Or maybe I've had the "recognition", after all, I've met some good like-minded people in this journey...

APR 9TH, 2016, 12:22PM



We live in strange country, in strange literary times...

I listen to Bruce Kaufmann's radio show out of Kingston, ON, and the writing is just soooo bad.
APR 9TH, 2016



That's why a petite kafka award given to me by new york's unbearables means more to me than any canadian acknowledgement.

its about what i do

you can trust that i will always promote you and your work internationally, Stephen.

APR 9TH, 2016



Despite a developing head cold, I went to the Edmonton launch of Black Cat in the Shadows by Blaine Greenwood this afternoon. Including myself, five showed up to hear Blaine. Pretty sad for an Alberta poet. His poems reminded me a lot of Richard Stevenson's 'Live Evil'. Imagine my surprise when Blaine told me Richard Stevenson edited the book. Not too friendly, this Blaine. Of course, I never announce who I am, or what I do. People tend to behave differently. Less like who they really are. I find it a sincere way to gauge writers and poets. How they treat perfect strangers tells me a lot about them beyond the persona they attempt to project.

APR 9TH, 2016



Yes. Being alone is an attribute writers and poets share. I spend a majority of my time alone, in my own company. After 21 years of marriage, I am learning to enjoy my single-hood. I interact with those poets and writers I care about, promote them whenever I can internationally. Social media and the internet has made the world very small, and to those of us who have learned to navigate its currents and eddies have a unique power and responsibility. There is no looking back now. APR 9TH, 2016, 7:01PM Chat Conversation End

MARK McCawley, EXCERPTS OF E-MAILS FROM MARK

As you may or may not know my manuscript was finally, officially rejected by Anvil Press after being held hostage by them for three years (that after being personally solicited by the publisher to submit it in late 2007). Even after several unresponsive queries, they never got back to me, so the final rejection came as no surprise, really. Personally, I figure they lost my manuscript and just didn't have the balls to admit it. Particularly when they wished me luck in placing my novel

elsewhere (I submitted a collection of short stories). If I didn't have a bad taste in my mouth concerning Canadian presses before, this latest experience certainly didn't add to it. At my age, I really don't have either the time or the interest to waste my time in publisher "slush piles" or embark on "the kiss my ass and I'll kiss your ass" nepotism that is rife in Canlit publishing circles. So, I'll stay where I've always been most comfortable (and welcome) - among other micropresses and zinesters. In thirty years, they are still among the most incredibly honorable and principled folks I've ever known (present company included). Otherwise, my once infected left foot is slowly on the mend. I admit, I'm growing weary of spending my days in a wheelchair and look forward to the day I'm walking about again (Spring, I hope).

01/20/2011

I'm writing to inquire if you'd be interested in blogging for the new Urban Graffiti site Daily feature.

Of course, the frequency of posts, their content, will be entirely up to you. I really enjoyed your recent essay, which I thought was in keeping with the mandate of UG.

Feel free to decline for any reason.

7/7/2012

Hi Stephen,

Of course, it was your most recent essay on Facebook which I was speaking about. It was so very refreshing, even on Facebook, to read an essay from a mind so well exercised in critical thinking — something so lacking among writers and poets, lately, it seems. That is exactly why you came to mind, Stephen.

That said, you are more than welcome to send UG essays and such, the next time something pushes you "over the edge". I find this generation of writers and poets nearly completely bereft of their own sense of literary history. It's almost as if after a period of time a writer just ceases to exist. If one reads the academic literary journals, or even the small press mags, there is no continuity of literary history. Because current academia frowns upon lyrical poetry, for instance, we see so little of it published. Same goes with an abysmal lack of critical abilities at the post secondary level, which I suppose is a perfect segue into your comments concerning the protests in Quebec.

I don't know about the rest of my literary brethren, but I see what's going in Quebec as somewhat of a microcosm of late 90s post Soviet balkanisation. Sects of French language society and culture have lived so long with subsidies that they cannot face the economic reality of the times. Therefore, the gov't is forced to pass laws even more draconian than before to retain civil order.

Yes, a part of me misses those imperfectly printed zines and chapbooks that were so distinctive, too.

Recently, my son Devin bought a bindery kit for making perfect bound books and booklets. He wants to use my online chapbook, *Collateral Damage*, that your press published in 2008 as the initial trial printing at some time in the future. I will contact you then about things like ISBNs, imprint logos, etcetera.

With the new UG site, there will be an archive section where readers can view those old issues and download pdf files.

I'm still going to publish hard copies, just in a new paradigm.

One thing is certain, though, publishers are not standing in line to bust down my door. Thank goodness for my DIY philosophy. LOL!

7/9/2012

I would put the blame for the extreme lack of knowledge of literary history, especially among my contemporaries, firmly at the feet of Canadian literary academia which has become so balkanized into regional academic fiefdoms. I think I fully realized this in the early 90s when the University of Alberta Press published the second volume of the Literary History of Alberta by George Melnyk. I had been active for most of the 80s in the Alberta literary scene, and not a single writer and poet I knew was considered part of Melnyk's Alberta literary history. Only academics with an MFA or better were considered worthy of his mention. To this day, that sort of elitism still sticks like a thorn in my craw (and is a pointed example of the corruption I feel is so rife in Canlit).

I have constantly, over decades, posed this query — why does every other country support a thriving transgressive, underground/outsider art and writing scene except Canada?

If there are no eccentrics left in Canlit (present company excluded, of course) it's because they have been systematically excluded and rarely published by graduates of the very same system. Eccentrics do exist, they are just so inconsistently invited to read at festivals, give interviews, etcetera.

I think you would agree with me it was the advent of academic fascism in the 80s that got the ball rolling. Group rights superseding individual ones.

It damaged poetry the most. Lyricism is almost considered a dirty word in Canlit. Almost all the Canlit poetry which crosses my desk deals with deconstruction and post modernist trickery.

Believe me, I am overjoyed when someone submits poetry with depth of feeling and breadth of allegory.

As for the job description of blogger for UG. It's pretty much a literary soapbox. The blogger is free to post whatever he/she wants as long as it fits the general mandate of the magazine —

which includes poetry, prose, essays, rants, reviews, recollections. Otherwise, pretty general. The frequency of posts, themselves, can be from one every week, to one every two weeks, to once a month. It's entirely up to the blogger. I'm entirely a hands-off editor. I limit my participation to proofing blogger's posts for typographical errors. Each blogger, whether they know it or not, carries their own literary history and knowledge thereof. At present, three writers have accepted my invitation to blog: Catherine Owen; a Canadian expatriate living in NYC, Tim Beckett; and Unbearables writer and poet, Jose Padua.

Glad to hear you are learning to make a book. Something so empowering about learning the process for oneself, yes?

7/10/2012

Docile and feminized are perfect words to describe the present state of Canadian writing and writers in Canada.

I agree completely regarding how English writers in Quebec are always under some kind of bureaucratic attack by the Quebec government (even Charest's Liberal Party government), and how French writers "have great life, money and awards, all paid for by the Federal government." I know a BC translator getting lots of work lately translating Quebec writers into English for English presses outside of Quebec (Anvil, House of Anansi). It's more than just a scam, in my opinion, it's cultural racketeering, and no one says anything about it for fear of losing grants, writer's in residency positions, tenure with creative writing programs in English Departments. Even reviews are not critical anymore, just pandering.

I'm pleased that Vehicule Press published a fairly inclusive literary history of English Quebec. From what I can tell, Vehicule Press has always been a press that English writers felt welcome amid the myriad French language storms which raged about it (i.e. notwithstanding clause which made English writers in Quebec second-class literary citizens).

Your prose may not come easy, Stephen, yet it is spectacularly good. Your thoughts are crisp, and your critiques and insights on issues refreshing. Whether your blogs be prose or poetry, or any other topic of interest to you, they are always welcome at UG.

7/11/2012

Thanks for the kind words regarding Urban Graffiti. It has long been, and still very much is, a labour of love. Moving online was probably the best move UG ever made, as it opened the magazine up to publishing art forms and to audiences it might not have otherwise reached. As a paper-based publication, UG just could not get the sort of distribution that most Canadian magazines did (and do) because of the stupid quota of Canadian writers per issues required for national distribution. Which is also why Canadian literary magazines and journals are so bloody dull. Are other writers as equally impressed as you? I don't know. I'm certain some academics still have a hate on for me and my cantankerous, curmudgeonly, contrarian ways.

I understand perfectly that you have been unable to contribute anything this past year — with the craziness of your own life, compounded with Carolyn's ill health, and the general madness which is Quebec under the PQ. Yes, Quebec is hopeless. Especially for Anglophones. I can understand why people are leaving. It's the only province in Canada that can get away with the public discrimination of an identifiable group (using the Notwithstanding clause) without repercussions. Still, I believe, as you do, that the majority of Quebecers are living in a fairy tale. Yes, the separatists have their heads firmly up their collective assholes. I have also been following the idiocy of the Language Police... I am reminded of a quote by Jean Genet from *Funeral Rites* that if you stare at a mad dog long enough, it will recite a poem to you.

Yes, please submit your essay on Dudek's poem. I thought the essay you supplied the link to was quite insightful, Stephen. Louis Dudek has long been one of Canada's unsung literary visionaries, over shadowed by more charismatic literary personalities of his day, but no less one himself. I look forward to receiving it.

3/5/2013

Yes, Stephen, it is really quite scary how uninformed and uneducated the current flood of academic poets happen to be — and this coming from a self-proclaimed autodidact. How can young poets, writers, possibly cite "other young poets as their models, their influence as poets..." I'm sadly afraid in Canadian literary circles this practice is merely a means to an end: to generate invitations for readings, book contracts, etcetera from such named contemporary influences, and vis-à-vis. My influences were also Blake, Poe, Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Antonin Artaud. In Canada, though, my major influences were the Contact Press poets, of which Dudek was one member. Poets need to understand, embrace their past, their literary inheritance, no matter where it comes from — unfortunately, Stephen, contemporary poets do neither.

Anyhow, now you know...

3/6/2013

Yes, Red Lane was a really good lyric poet. He spoke from the lyrical, emotive self as all good poets do.

Unfortunately, too many poets are being published because of reputation and personality instead of the actual work. But have they written anything memorable? Nothing comes to my mind, either. This is what occurs when mediocrity is lauded and awarded. And ultimately, people become tremendously fearful of criticizing them or their work. I chuckle to myself whenever I see these poets lauded in OpenBook or Quill & Quire, because I know after two or more decades, UG will never appear in their pages.

Sometimes publishing is not a poet's best friend. I have a collection of short stories, and each and every one is published in magazines, journals, and anthologies. Still, no Canadian publisher will

give them a second look (sometimes not even a first look). It's obvious to me the fiction I write is not welcome by Canadian publishers. Do I whine? Not at all. I just write. That is my lot.

It does free me, though, to critique all the phony bastards. This I relish with a certain glee.

Quite corrupt, Quebec and CanLit, both. Is there anything more entertaining, though, than listening to the corrupted try to justify their corruption?

3/7/2013

I just finished reading your essay on Dudek, and I must say, it's a splendid piece of writing, and well worth all the work you put into it. I will be very pleased to publish the essay in Urban Graffiti.

You accomplish everything you set out to do in writing this essay, and more. "To tell poets today of what poetry used to be like, it was serious and visionary, and poets were helpful to each other, it wasn't all awards, creative writing, and ego." You quite correctly remind the current generation that influences arise not just from one's contemporaries. And shaming them for being so incredibly insular in their tastes. My impression is that the academics, the few who read it, seemed to feel that I was treading on their precious turf, which is peer reviewed and tenure track. "Interesting stuff" someone wrote to me.

I'm not surprised, Stephen. I sense that, for the most part, academics have long abdicated their role as cultural critics and cultural arbiters of literary tastes in lieu of personal self promotion. There is rarely, if any, dialogue concerning poetry and Canada's influential poets (such as Dudek). Those who self-profess influences other than Canadian, particularly American, are quite often shunned, or ignored outright. Indeed, my own influences are largely American, and much like Dudek, have been shunned and ignored accordingly by my contemporaries.

I agree, though conservative critics, Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye were both failed poets, and could not quite grasp what Dudek was endeavoring to do with *Continuation*. I think it is even worse today, now that academia has become so insular, balkanized, and unresponsive to outside input (whatever the source).

That said, I started UG to publish essays just like the one you wrote, Stephen. To promote dialogue where presently there is little, or none.

3/28/2013

From its very inception in 1993, I've always wanted to include essays in UG that question the literary status quo in CanLit; its insular nature, the increasing Balkanization of regions and provinces. Especially essays by those who have played a significant part in Canada's literary history, such as yourself, Stephen. Perhaps back in the 70s and 80s such essays were more

widely written since there were more venues for them, but since then, fewer and fewer poets actually speak up on any matter. It's like a chronic fear of offending.
3/29/2013

Yes, this era of narrow vision does, indeed, sum it up. This generation of writers seems addicted to their own ignorance, their own sycophantic nature. Will be publishing your Dudek piece in a week or so. Mark
4/9/2013

Being who I am, I cannot do otherwise but be honest to myself, and to my calling. Whether that be as a poet, writer, editor, or publisher. I'm certain that those who abhor my honesty have long since removed me from their active news feed (if not removed me from their social network altogether). Though I find it intriguing that the very same writers who won't give me the time of day on Facebook, endorse me on LinkedIn. Go figure?
4/4/2014

It's sad how the current atmosphere of CanLit has silenced so many writers and poets. I've certainly reached the point where the threat of not getting published by subsidized presses if I speak my mind has no effect upon me. These subsidized books disappear too soon anyway. It's almost as if a decade after they were published they don't exist culturally speaking. So when I say, "the emperor has no clothes" it's not only for the benefit of my own generation, but those that come after it. Nepotism should never be allowed to trump integrity. And I think we can both agree that the literary status quo truly stinks.
7/4/2014

Transgressive means more than what is raunchy, sexual, or deviant. It also means the pushing of boundaries, personally and professionally. It challenges the reader's notions of what poetry is, what it can be, and does so succinctly.
4/21/2015

Oh, yes, some of the biggest, most insulting pricks I've ever encountered were academics. They think they know everything and that their opinions mean more than most others facts, so they rarely rely on research. They cannot help but insult, especially those who are self-taught, like myself. If you are uploading reviews of your books, upload only those reviews with a positive, critical bent. There is no use for negative reviews. I won't even write them, let alone publish them.
6/7/2015

You are fortunate, Stephen, to have been a poet and a writer in Montreal during a rich time for poetry and literature. I seldom met an academic writer or poet in Alberta who wasn't self-serving. Alberta universities seem to attract these second rate writers that couldn't make it elsewhere, so they came here, joined the academic clique, got published by the local academic presses, then moved on to the West coast, or sometimes disappeared altogether. Yet if you were outside of that academic clique, you simply did not exist. I recall these two female MFA graduates of Bert Almon's Creative Writing Program who started a small press called Espresso Publishing in the early 1990s. Their gimmick was to publish poetry on paper scrolls inside handmade boxes (I've still got a couple boxes archived). Almon reviewed what they were doing and Quill and Quire published it. Espresso Publishing soon went defunct, yet it always picked my craw that Quill and Quire never once reviewed what Greensleeve Editions or Urban Graffiti was doing. It was as though I was on some kind of blacklist or refused access to some academics only club. Time and experience has certainly born this observation out. Ironically, now that I have created a vehicle for international exposure, academics are flocking to UG to be published and reviewed. Thankfully I have a strict mandate that keeps me on the editorially straight and narrow.

6/8/2015

It's a different era today for poetry publishing than when our early collections were published. Then, the poet was allowed, if not encouraged, to meander and experiment with form and content, unlike today, where every line and every poem in a collection has to be perfect. In *The Trees of Unknowing*, I think I liked best those poems that leaned toward the lyrical. In those, I believe you were closest to finding your authentic voice. Those and the prose poems. They still stand up today. That is something to be said about a first collection.

Yes, those old Evergreen Reviews you sent are still "relevant and interesting to read". Editors and publishers today, especially in Canada, fail to realize the writers in those issues weren't all that popular back then. That only came later. When today's writers and editors try to tell me a certain kind of writing isn't popular and shouldn't be published because it isn't marketable, I remind them of that fact. It usually does not help though. Canlit has become so elitist and middle-class.

6/28/2015

Most poets in Canada just seem to imitate their contemporaries (language poems, ghazals, surrealist poems, science poems, etcetera). Anything besides the lyrical and the exploration and examination of the human condition. It's as though they are only writing for a cadre of academics and awards juries. It's no surprise so much contemporary poetry has become, as you say, "unreadable and a waste of time." After publishing almost a hundred poems in magazines and anthologies, I quit writing poetry for publication. The editors were becoming increasingly narrow-minded to the point that I considered them obtuse. Journals like *The Fiddlehead*, *CV2*, and *Arc* which used to publish fresh evocative new poetry are like every other academic journal now infected with nice "little poems that could have been written by any other of the creative writing students..." If I publish my poetry again, it will be a collection of hardcore, transgressive prose poems... I believe the function of books ought to be two-fold — to alter the literary

landscape, and shake up the status quo. Too many poetry collections are published out of sheer ambition and careerism.

6/29/2015

This generation of "Formalists" and academics born out of MFA creative writing courses have created a two-tiered literary culture in Canada. One that is accessible to publishing, festivals, tours, grants, etcetera — and another that is excluded from them; to a greater or lesser degree depending upon where they are based. Here in Alberta, I am persona non grata because I possess no degrees, and do not exist as part of this province's literary history. Ironic, isn't it, to be known nationally and internationally as an underground editor, fiction writer, and poet, yet totally excluded where I live. The story is similar in other provinces, too, with other writers. Ageism in Canlit is rampant. You don't see this occurring elsewhere in the world. Only in Canada. Which is why I started UG so long ago — to combat this exclusion. Publish writers based on the quality of their work, not their reputation, and reward them with international exposure. Canlit now is just a small club for "Formalists" only. A marketplace for banality. Believe me, I have never been so busy publishing new work, conducting interviews and such. This represents the tier that contemporary Canlit ignores. I say leave Canlit to their cookie-cutter poems, their awards, their MFA creative writing courses.

Trouble with so many young poets nowadays, Stephen, is that they do not want to put in the time it takes to truly digest a book of poems. They want an easy read. Easy metaphors. They haven't the patience to consume a book that expands its metaphor allegorically (sometimes over several books). Or rework short poems into a long poem (as George Amabile did). Indeed, a poet's poetry becomes more complex as they get older, wiser. How can a twentysomething poet possibly speak of life when they haven't even lived? I've crafted some wonderful poems in my youth, but nothing close to the poems penned by Cohen, Layton, or Dudek. A poem is an ephemeral thing. They come from a special place.

7/2/2015

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Cover image: Image from Mark McCawley's Facebook page

Note: Mark corresponded with many other writers and I hope some of them will one day make his letters public, including poems he may have sent to them. These are excerpts from E-mail I received from Mark, messages on Facebook, and some of his final Facebook comments.

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**NO LOOKING BACK NOW
MARK MCCAWLEY
IN HIS OWN WORDS**



Mark McCawley, who died suddenly in April 2016, was an Edmonton-based writer, publisher, and critic. Mark published and edited *Urban Graffiti*, a litzone that has an international reputation for publishing transgressive texts, including short stories, poetry, criticism, in-depth interviews with artists, and reviews of books, visual art, and music.

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BY STEPHEN MORRISSEY